

Henry IV. and Toleration.

Henry acted in matters of faith as the conventional *bona fide* Catholic sovereign of the time, to whom Protestantism was error, which it was his duty to combat abroad, if not at home. While he interceded for the persecuted Catholics of England and Holland, he opposed the spread of Protestantism in Italy, where he acted the part of the champion of the Roman Church and the temporal power of the pope. He warned the pope and the Doge of Venice to be on their guard against the propagandism of Geneva. He identified himself completely with the interests of the Church to which he professed adhesion, while honourably resisting all pressure to encroach on the edict of toleration at home. His *role* as "the most Christian king " exacted the profession of an orthodoxy which would not admit any truckling to heresy outside the compulsory minimum. The day of the philosopher-king had not yet come in an age in which religious prejudice and passion were strong on either side. Conciliation could not venture beyond the Edict of Nantes, and even if Henry had desired to favour freedom of conscience as a principle of universal application, his official position as a Catholic sovereign would have rendered the attempt hopeless. It is all the more to his credit that he persistently refused to resile from his engagements to his former fellow-Protestants. He never forgot what he owed to the Huguenots, even when called on to play the part of a zealous Catholic. " I have been far too well served and assisted by them," said he, " in the days of my adversity, to yield on this point, and, besides, I should excite far more dangerous commotions in the State than in the past." And It should not be forgotten that the Edict of Nantes, with all its limitations, was a great achievement, considering the circumstances of the age. Henry achieved what it was impossible to attain in other countries, where either Catholicism or Protestantism was in the ascendant. He compelled the adherents of the two creeds to live in peace on fairly equitable terms. Protestants could publicly worship God, and even exercise the rights of citizenship in spite of their creed. This was a great step in advance of the narrow religious antagonisms which persecution had begotten. In England, Scotland, Germany, Holland, not to speak of Italy, Austria, Spain, this was impossible for many a long day. From this point of